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A Memorial Sketch of the Life and Character
of the late Jacob Simmons Mosher, A. M.,
M. D., Ph. D., of Albany, N. Y.*

By WILLIS G. TUCKER, M. D.



There are some men whose deaths occasion such a sense of loss that after the lapse even of months or years their places still seem to be unfilled. There are some lives which are at once so interesting and so useful, that when their light goes out the loss seems such as cannot be repaired. Such men are rare. They are not of the multitude whose coming occasions no remark and whose going causes no regret, but they belong to that small minority who by force of character, persevering effort or inherent ability make their impress upon the times in which they live, within a circle narrower or wider, by taking a part so active in all movements tending to promote the public good as to make themselves a real necessity in the community in which their lot is cast. And if this public-spirited zeal is the outcome of a nature really great; of a character developed by education, rounded and perfected by the habit of self-control,—how great the public loss when such men die, and how deep the sense of bereavement, within that narrower circle of friends who best have known and therefore best have appreciated those virtues of character and qualities of mind which all have admired. Such a loss have the friends of Dr. Mosher; such a loss has the community in which he lived, experienced in his death, for rarely indeed do we find so many traits which make a man lovable to his friends and serviceable to the public, blended in a single character, and

* Reprinted from the Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of New York, 1885.

though a year and more has passed since he was summoned hence, the recollection of his pure and well-spent life is fresh and green in the hearts of his friends and the places which he so long and ably filled seem mutely calling yet for his return.

Jacob Simmons Mosher, was born in Coeymans, Albany County, N. Y., March 19th, 1834. His father, Christopher Mosher, a prosperous farmer, was of English descent, and his mother, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Boucher, was of German parentage but born in this country. He early attended the district school in Coeymans, and on the removal of his parents to New Brunswick, N. J., was sent to the preparatory school of Rutgers college in that place, and in 1853 entered the college in which he remained till toward the close of his junior year, when circumstances seemed to render it necessary for him to discontinue his course. This he did, however, with great regret, for he had taken high rank in his classes and was regarded as a most promising scholar. Soon after leaving college he came to Albany and for a time was principal of Public School No. 1, on South Pearl street. In 1862 he matriculated at the Albany Medical College, entering the office of the late Professor Howard Townsend, to whom he was warmly attached. He graduated with the class of 1863, December 22d, presenting a thesis upon *Diabetes* marked by much originality and research, and delivering the valedictory address at the commencement. In 1863, while still a student of medicine, he was appointed Instructor in Chemistry and Experimental Philosophy in the Albany Academy, and in 1865, was made Professor of Chemistry in that institution, serving as such until 1870. In 1864 he was commissioned a volunteer surgeon by Governor Seymour, and assigned to duty with the Army of the Potomac, then before Petersburg. Subsequently he was appointed Assistant Medical Director for the State of New York, and assigned to duty at Washington, where he remained several months, and resigning returned to Albany. In July of this year he had been appointed Lecturer on Chemistry in the Albany Medical College, and in the December following, his first course of lectures having been very successful, he was appointed Professor of Chemistry and Medical Jurisprudence, serving also as registrar and librarian of the college from 1865. In January, 1869, Governor Hoffman, appointed him surgeon with rank of Brigadier-General

on his staff, and during the same year he was appointed Military Superintendent and Surgeon in charge of the hospital for disabled soldiers in Albany, serving in this capacity until the hospital was closed by the Government, when he transferred the troops to Logan, Maine. He was re-commissioned Surgeon-General in 1871 and served in this capacity until the end of Governor Hoffman's term of office, January 1st, 1873. In 1870 he resigned his professorship in the Albany Medical College, having been appointed Deputy Health and Executive officer of the Port of New York, and removed to Quarantine, Staten Island, where he remained until 1876, when he resigned his position, and after a few months spent in European travel, returned to Albany and again entered upon the practice of his profession. In January of that year he had been appointed Professor of Medical Jurisprudence and Hygiene in the Albany Medical College, and re-elected registrar, and in 1881, he was made Professor of Pathology, Practice, Clinical Medicine and Hygiene, which position he held up to the time of his death.

Aside from the positions which have been named, Dr. Mosher held many others scarcely less conspicuous or important. In 1878 he served as a member of the Commission of Experts, appointed by President Hayes, to study the origin and cause of the yellow fever epidemic of that year, and the effectual work done by this board, though their report has never been published by the Government, resulted in the creation of the National Board of Health. For many years he served on the medical or surgical staffs of the Albany and St. Peters' Hospitals, and he was one of the founders, trustees and professors of the Albany College of Pharmacy, established in 1881, and the president of its faculty. He was a member of the Albany County Medical Society, from 1864, of the Richmond County Medical Society, from 1873 to 1876, a permanent member of the Medical Society of the State of New York from 1870, a Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine, a member of the New York Neurological Society, and a permanent member of the American Medical Association. He served as president of the Albany County Medical Society in 1872, and in March, 1883, was elected president of the Association of the Alumni of the Albany Medical College. The annual meeting of this association, held March 5th, 1884, at

which, had he lived, he would have presided, was made a memorial meeting, and fitting eulogies delivered by Dr. David Murray, secretary of the Board of Regents of the State of New York, Regent St. Clair, McKelway and Dr. Samuel B. Ward. He received the degree of Master of Arts from Rutgers College in 1862; the same institution in 1878 conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and he received the honorary degree of Graduate in Pharmacy from the Albany College of Pharmacy in 1882. For many years he had been a member of the Albany Institute, serving for some time as its secretary, and several of his scientific papers have appeared in its proceedings. He was a member of the Albany City Board of Health, and its chairman at the time of his death. From 1865 to 1868 he was a member of the Board of Public Instruction of Albany; in 1869 he was made a member of the Executive Committee of the State Normal School at Albany; in 1878 he was elected president of the Young Men's Association, and during the same year he was elected a member of the board of trustees of the Albany Female Academy.

He was married December 30th, 1863, to Miss Emma Starr Montgomery, of Albany, who died in 1879, leaving four sons and a daughter, all of whom survive.

In thus recounting somewhat at length the main incidents in Dr. Mosher's life, it may be thought that an estimate of his character, and a recital of those mental qualities which made him so remarkable a man, and those social traits which so endeared him to his friends, has been too long delayed. That the task is a difficult one, no one who knew him will probably deny, for his character was so many-sided that to recount his traits is to enumerate so many qualities, that the rehearsal must seem an exaggeration to those who did not know the man; and then again so much of the influence he exerted and admiration he excited depended upon an indescribable charm of manner, impossible to delineate, that at the best, any pen-drawn picture of him, must be chiefly remarkable for that which it fails to portray. He was a man who in a rare degree combined depth of knowledge with extraordinary versatility. His memory was so retentive, that facts once ascertained were ever remembered, and as anything that had interest for thoughtful men had interest for him, he was constantly searching for

information on all kinds of subjects and in all kinds of places. And this searching was not a merely superficial glancing at the matter sought, but a real getting at the facts, and when these were brought to light, they found a lodgement in his mind, and could at any time be recalled for use. He had a true scholar's love for books ; knew what they contained and how to get from them in the shortest time just what he wanted to glean. New books he would rapidly skim, soon discovering in them what was, or might be, of value to him, and mentally indexing such portions as particularly concerned him. He thus became a kind of walking reference-book of universal information to his friends, who felt that they could always get from him, or from his books through him, such information as frequently they needed, but knew not where to seek.

Two other qualities which are seldom associated he also combined ; great shrewdness, with the ability to read men and judge character, and a free handed generosity, with strong faith in human nature. He had the cunning adroitness of an astute politician, and yet in his dealings with men there was none of the petty jealousy and tendency suspiciously to look for selfish motives that is so often linked with shrewdness. He was an ambitious man, but other motives took precedence in his life, and he could with equanimity view the successful advances of others. To study character was to him a real delight, but it was not for the purpose of unmasking faults or exposing foibles, but because he loved to trace the workings of the mind and learn from human nature all that it could teach. This knowledge of men, and how to deal with and lead them without their knowing they were led, made his influence great. He suggested views, and so frankly, that his hearers naturally accepted them, for there was a modest, half-hesitancy and seeming self-forgetfulness in his method, which did not arouse antagonism as self-assertion does. And these qualities, joined to his great alertness of perception, instant ability to get at the gist of things, and rare faculty of thinking quickly but speaking slowly, rendered him an expert witness with whom it was difficult to cope. His mind was so well disciplined ; his passions so entirely under the control of his will, that seldom, even in the heat of argument, did he make assertions that he could not substantiate, or take a position from which he was obliged afterward to recede.

Dr. Mosher was an indefatigable worker. He had given much attention to surgery, and performed many operations; he had attended to a large and rapidly increasing medical practice, and delivered two courses of lectures upon the theory and practice of medicine; he had devoted some of the best years of his life to the study of chemistry and toxicology, for six years lecturing upon these branches, and making of them a profession; he had studied botany and lectured upon it and *materia-medica* for two years in the College of Pharmacy; he had made a special study, with long practical experience, of sanitary science and hygiene in all its relations, and had delivered five courses of lectures upon these topics; he had given much attention to insanity and general medical jurisprudence, upon which he had lectured in conjunction with hygiene, and with all this he had found time to write numerous scientific papers, to contribute frequently to medical journals, and to deliver many addresses and popular lectures. He had time also to attend to a large business and personal correspondence; time for book-collecting and for the many hobbies which he indulged. He was a bibliophile, not a bibliomaniac, valuing books for what they contained that was useful to him, and few volumes could be found in his library which did not show by pencilled notes or inserted cuttings how carefully they had been read, or at least examined. He was an authority upon prints and etchings, of which he had made an interesting collection, and in the mechanical production of these, as well as of books, he was well versed. And yet, busy man as he was, his time was ever at the disposal of his friends, his students, or even his casual acquaintances, for he could listen with a patience that never tired to applications for assistance, counsel or information, and it was a source of never-ending wonder to his friends that he could give, good naturedly as he did, so much of his time to people, often uninteresting in themselves and in their missions, who solicited his counsel or advice. He took but little recreation, though he was a good sportsman, fond of the gun and rod, and had a real sailor's love for the water, but when these tastes were indulged he threw off care and was, as always in his hours of social intercourse with friends, the most agreeable companion, capital story-teller, and brilliant conversationalist, who could adapt himself to all kinds of people and feel at home in any society.

His was a sympathetic nature, ever ready to minister to the needy, cheer the down-hearted, and encourage the struggling worker in any field, and his friends seeing that he possessed integrity without hypocrisy, true nobility of character without affectation or pride, a deep fund of knowledge of men and things and affairs, without pretense or pedantry, geniality without vulgarity, and a warm-hearted charity which never failed, loved him from the bottom of their hearts. Such men are rare,—so rare that when they pass away, the vacancy their deaths create seem all too vast for others to step in and fill.

Dr. Mosher died suddenly on the morning of the 13th of August, 1883. For a few preceding days he had complained of pain in the region of his heart, but so unconcernedly that it had given little anxiety to his friends. An attendant, failing to arouse him at the usual morning hour by tapping upon his door, entered the room to find him dead upon the bed. That very day he was to have started on his summer vacation, and the previous evening, having made all things ready, had gone to his room, laid himself upon the bed and taken up a book to read. Death must have come soon after, and as unexpectedly as painlessly. The autopsy showed that it resulted from heart failure, consequent upon degeneration of the coronary arteries and acute endocarditis. The funeral took place from St. Paul's Church, of which he was a communicant, on the sixteenth instant. His death was felt to be a great public calamity, and the daily journals of Albany and many other places reviewed his life and character at length in eulogistic terms. The trustees and officers of the many institutions and organizations with which he was connected held special meetings and adopted resolutions of regret for his death and respect for his memory, and now, though months have passed, his influence remains, and his noble qualities, his many virtues, and his great abilities are not forgotten.



